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Clerk at CIA, Ghanaian lover held in spy case

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A CIA employee formerly based in Ghana and a male companion related to that country's leader have been arrested on charges of conspiring to reveal the identities of U.S. CIA agents and their Ghanaian intelligence sources, the FBI said yesterday.

As a result of the alleged espionage, numerous Ghanaians who had secretly cooperated with the CIA in that West African country were taken into custody and more than one has been killed, an informed intelligence expert told The Washington Times.

Some U.S. CIA agents had to be recalled from Ghana when their identities had been revealed, Justice Department sources said.

Sharon M. Scranage, 29, King George, Va., who served in the CIA station at Accra, Ghana, and her Ghanaian friend, Michael Agbotui Soussoudis, 39, were arrested in Virginia and charged with conspiracy to commit espionage. They were being held without bond.

Ms. Scranage, a divorcee, admitted she passed security information from CIA files in Accra to Mr. Soussoudis from December 1983 until last May, when she was transferred to the CIA headquarters here, the FBI said.

Ms. Scranage wept as she arrived for the magistrate's hearing. She was then placed alone in a cell near the magistrate's office where she cried quietly while waiting for U.S. marshals to remove her to the Arlington County jail.

FBI Agent Julianne Slifco said in an affidavit that Ms. Scranage admitted that she knew the information included the "true identifies of CIA assets in Ghana," meaning confidential sources who were providing information to the CIA.

She also was aware, from her admissions, that Mr. Soussoudis was passing the information to Ghanaian intelligence agents and officials, Ms. Slifco said in the affidavit.

The FBI said the Ghanaians also obtained a CIA report on efforts by Ghanaian strongman Jerry J. Rawlings' military government to get weapons from the radical North African nation of Libya.

The affidavits said Ms. Scranage made her statements during questioning by the FBI in McLean Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. FBI Direcor William Webster said yesterday the investigation was conducted with the full cooperation of the CIA.

Other information Ms. Scranage admitted passing to Mr. Soussoudis, according to the affidavit, included classified CIA cable traffic, the contents of an intelligence report concerning dissident groups in Ghana, CIA communications and radio equipment and operational plans concerning intelligence gathering methods of the CIA station in Accra.

Just before her transfer, the affidavit said, Ms. Scranage said she met with Mr. Soussoudis and Ghanaian officials including an intelligence agent, who urged her to obtain more information from files of the CIA headquarters.

They particularly wanted to learn the identities of three Ghanains who were traveling abroad and who had supplied information to the CIA, she told the FBI, according to the affidavit. They said Mr. Soussoudis would visit her in Washington to get the information.

According to Justice Department sources, Mr. Soussoudis, a self-employed business consultant, and Miss Scranage, a divorced, $22,000-a-year clerk, became lovers in Ghana's capital in 1983.

FBI agents arrested Mr. Soussoudis in the Holiday Inn motel in Springfield Wednesday where he apparently was waiting for an expected rendezvous with Ms. Scranage, sources said.

She was arrested yesterday in the Marriott Hotel at Tyson's Corner in suburban Virginia.

Court documents said Mr. Soussoudis had about $2,700 in American money and pound sterling, but told officials he could not afford to hire a lawyer.

Ghana is a country of "middle-range" importance as far as U.S. intelligence interests are concerned, an informed intelligence source said.

Its ties to Libya could mean that CIA secrets allegedly passed to the government in Accra were relayed to Libyan leader Col. Moammar Qaddafi and, very likely, to the Soviet Union.

An American intelligence expert, who requested anonymity, said yesterday it is "not infrequent" for U.S. intelligence to use one country as a base to gather information about other nations.

He said Ghana is a "communications center" for U.S. intelligence operations in Central and West Africa, especially Nigeria, as well as concerning Libya's efforts to gain influence in the region.

The State Department yesterday refused to speculate on whether U.S.-Ghanaian relations, which it characterized as "a good working diplomatic relations," might be damaged by spy disclosures.

In separate hearings yesterday in Alexandria, U.S. Magistrate W. Harris Grimsley ordered both held without bail pending detention hearings July 19.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Justin Williams said, "There is strong evidence that he [Mr. Soussoudis] . . . is actively engaged in espionage against the United States."

One intelligence source said Mr. Soussoudis was a member of the Ghanaian intelligence service in addition to being related to Mr. Rawlings.

"I am not associated with any intelligence service in Ghana," Mr. Soussoudis said. "I am just related to the head of state, that's all."

He was taken immediately to the District of Columbia jail.

There were conflicting reports regarding East Germany's role in Ghanaian security and intelligence operations. Some intelligence experts said East Germany maintains complete control over these operations and said the alleged penetration of the CIA operation was "too sophisticated" for the Ghanaians to manage on their own.

Other sources said the Ghanaians did exercise control over their security services.

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Mary Scranage, Ms. Scranage's mother, said the arrest came as a surprise although her daughter had confided to her some days ago that "she had a problem."

"But, no, she really didn't talk," Mrs. Scranage said.

Her daughter, a member of the Corinthean Baptist Church in Washington, had always been very active in church activities, she said.

The Rev. John W. Chapman, pastor of the Little Ark Baptist Church in King George said she joined his charge at an early age.

"I do not believe the charges against her are true," he said. "I believe that if there was any such thing as secrets being passed from her hands, she did it under threat. Her loyalty to her country, church and God is beyond reproach."

At the church, Miss Scranage discussed "some things that happened in Africa," and told the minister "she had to flee from where she was staying," Mr. Chapman said, declining to elaborate.

"She said she didn't know when she was going back, and I let it drop right there," he said.

Intelligence sources said Ms. Scranage's official "cover" in Accra was at the U.S. Embassy, although this could not be immediately confirmed.

She was employed as a CIA operations support assistant, the affidavits said. One source said that in that capacity she could have run safe houses in the country and participated in other "administrative" CIA operations.

As such, she is said to have had a great deal of information concerning U.S. agents and operatives there.

Intelligence sources speculated that the Ghanaians would have wanted to continue "running" Ms. Scranage as an agent and to get more information out of her from wherever she was reassigned by the CIA.

This intelligence would likely be shared with others, such as the Soviets, as a trade for other information. The Ghanaians, the sources said, would have wanted her relationship with Mr. Soussoudis to continue.

Mr. Rawlings has ruled Ghana since he lead a Dec. 31 1981, coup that toppled then-President Hilla Limann.

Early in his rule Mr. Rawlings developed close ties with Libya and Soviet bloc countries and promised to use Cuba as the model for Ghana's development.

In recent years Ghana has received about $1 billion from western nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank which has allowed it to begin stabilizing its economy. The Reagan administration has requested $20 million in foreign aid to Ghana in fiscal 1986, three-quarters of which would be for food.

Dave Doubrava, Kevin Cook and Pam McClintock contributed to this report.

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